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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PROPOSED BRIDGE,

AND

BRIDGE-TAX:

HUMBLY OFFERED TO THE

TOWN-COUNCIL of EDINBURGH,

R
And to the INHABITANTS of the CITY and COUNTY.

B Y

AN OLD HEREDITARY BURGESS, and
PROPRIETOR in both CITY and COUNTY.

EDINBURGH:

M,DCC,LXXV.

[PRICE THREE-PENCE.]



OBSERVATIONS, &c.

ON pretence of the necessity of making a proper avenue from the South to the High Street of Edinburgh, we are threatened with a tax that would fall very heavy on us all, though it can be of little or no advantage but to a few. Every body, except the immediate partizans and dependents of the devisers of the scheme, are loud in their clamours against it; yet I see none preparing to oppose it with the vigour requisite to be exerted for defeating such an unjust and oppressive project. People are probably deterred by an apprehension of being necessarily foiled by the superior interest of the true parents of the scheme: for it is sufficiently known, that the ostensible proposer of it is only in the same situation with a nobleman's footman, who fathers the misshapen bastard that his Lordship begot. I thought, therefore, that it might be proper to expose to the view of every man, the weak sides of this scheme; some of which arise from its own nature, and others from the method of conducting it: and its defects, in both views, are such as may give us well-grounded assurances of its being easily overthrown, if we exert half the vigour against the imposition of this heavy burden, that has often been shewn against others of much less moment.

If a projector should conceive a scheme, by which he thinks a gentleman's estate may be improved or beautified, he would be reckoned, not only a very ignorant, but also a very rude and unmannerly fellow, if, instead of laying his plan before the gentleman himself, he should apply to the most powerful of his neighbours, and endeavour to compel him, by their influence and power, to make such alterations in his house, gardens, &c. as would make the best figure in the eye of the projector, and afford the happiest termination for the vista's of the noblemen in the neighbourhood; yet, in this manner, has the present scheme been carried on. It has been proposed to pull down houses, open new passages, and build new bridges in the city of Edinburgh; and new taxes are to be imposed, which must principally affect the inhabitants, by straitening both their subsistence and their trade; yet these inhabitants have been totally neglected. Nor has any application been made to the Magistrates and Town-council, before whom any proposal of this nature ought first to be laid; as it is to them that the Constitution has entrusted the management of the city affairs, as they are the natural guardians of the city and its privileges, and as they cannot be supposed totally ignorant of their own interest. The projector, on the contrary, has treated all these with the same contempt as if they had been infants or idiots. He called in the gentlemen of the county, many of whom are overawed by the powerful weight of the *Family-compact*; and hopes, merely by the use of their names, to compel the city of Edinburgh to bow the back to the burden, that he, and his brethren from the south, may roll at their ease over the New-bridge, and entertain their eyes with a view of the Register-office, while they frighten the peaceable inhabitants of the Cowgate with the rattling of wheels over their heads. The naming of the Lord Provost to be one of the Committee for framing the Bill, makes no amends for the original slight put upon the City, in having previously concluded, without consulting them, whether any such bill should be framed. I know not in what light the Provost will look on this, or how he will act: but I am sure it cannot be properly considered, otherwise than as an indignity to him, and a direct insult on the understanding and privileges of the citizens, to give an appearance of consulting them, when, in reality,

ty, they are neglected. For the Lord Provost, who would have appeared with weight and dignity, if commissioned and appointed by the inhabitants to deliver their sentiments, is degraded from being the first Magistrate of the first city in North Britain, when he is named a member by the county. He is, in their Committee, reduced to his single voice, and can be of no more consequence than any other private gentleman.

BEFORE a man can rationally engage in any scheme, he must first know the expence of its execution, and the advantages, that he has good grounds to think, will arise from it. The true intent of the Bridge scheme, and the proposed advantages, I have told you above. But the projector has not told us, for he knows not, what the expence will be. At the first meeting called on this affair, he said he had calculated the expence; but two people present, proprietors of houses intended to be pulled down, declared that he had never visited their houses, nor asked the rent nor the price of them. What a vague uncertain manner is this of forming a calculation of a plan, whose execution must cost several thousand pounds Sterling? And I dare say, that if the projector were examined upon oath, he knows no more of the other houses than he did of these two. How then can he pretend to know what the expence will amount to, even supposing he were architect enough to understand the business? This method of proceeding can only arise from the insidious design of drawing us in to begin the work, as being well persuaded, that when people have once gone half way through with it, they will be easily induced to finish the remainder. The precipitancy with which this affair has been hurried on, also plainly indicates this design. For no sooner was the scheme proposed, than immediately a Committee was appointed to prepare a bill to be carried to Parliament. Whereas, in the proper and usual method of conducting business, a Committee should have been appointed to employ proper tradesmen to survey and put a value on the houses, and to receive plans and calculations of the expence of the intended work, from people who would find proper security for executing them at such and such rates. All this, too, should have been done under the sanction of the Magistrates and Town-

council of Edinburgh, who, together with the inhabitants, are principally concerned; and, consequently, have the best title to be previously consulted, and principally to determine in this affair. If any of these plans and calculations had been reported to, and approved of, by a General Meeting, then, and not till then, was the time to prepare a bill for Parliament, as it is only from the certain knowledge of these necessary preliminaries, that a proper bill could be framed. These are the natural, usual, and prudent steps to be taken in such an affair. The neglect, and, indeed, the designed omission of these, is a sufficient reason for your opposition; and, if you are not wanting to yourselves, will be found a sufficient reason to defeat the whole scheme.

So far we see that the Bridge scheme has been ill concerted and ill conducted; and its most zealous partisans must acknowledge, that they have hitherto proceeded in a very unusual manner, either from ignorance, or from intention. Whichever of these has been the cause of their conduct, it will readily be granted, that neither of these reasons can entitle it much to our favour. Let us consider, then, whether the equity of the intended taxation ought to render it more agreeable to us.

NOTHING can be more just and reasonable, than for every person to contribute, according to his abilities, to the support of government, and the defence of the nation; because, every one receives an advantage from thence, proportionable to his situation in life. But, in private bills, as they are merely local, all possible care is taken, that the burden shall only fall on those who reap the benefit. I can only tell it you in plain English; but the proposer of this scheme can inform you, that this is a fixed and unalterable maxim in law, and can repeat it in Latin, and quote the *Corpis Juris* for it. How he has forgot it on this occasion, I cannot tell. If I travel along the road, I pay for keeping it in repair. They who cross a ferry, pay for it. Ships that go to a certain port, and coasters, contribute to the light-house. But here it is proposed, that every body from the east, from the west, from the north, must pay—For what? For an entrance for coaches from the south, by
which

which carriages, that have been worn out in bringing provisions for the citizens, may never once have had occasion to pass. The very inhabitants of the Cowgate must be taxed to raise an odious bridge, that darkens their windows, interrupts the free circulation of air, and renders their habitations damp and unhealthy: For they are mistaken, if they think they escape the tax by not paying at the toll-bar. They are taxed when a tax is laid on their flour, butter, meal, milk, eggs, and every individual article of their trade and subsistence. The commerce of the city must be taxed at the avenue to the sea-port; the subsistence of the city, at the eastern and western avenues, for the sake of a hundred yards of bridge, that will be convenient only to a few people from the south. There are on the water of Leith, about fourscore mills, which supply Edinburgh with almost all their flour and meal. None of these can receive any benefit from the new scheme; but all of them must be sufferers by it, unless they indemnify themselves by raising the prices, which is well known to be the immediate effect of all taxes; but must be much more the effect of this, as the burden will fall mostly upon those avenues that supply the commerce and subsistence of the town, and very slightly on the noblemen and gentlemen on the south side, who are the devisers of the scheme, and ought to pay dearest for it.

THE opposing this scheme is, by its projectors, called *want of PUBLIC SPIRIT*. Shall that sacred name be usurped by people, who, for their own private conveniency, would oppress all the individuals of which the public consists? For this tax is not the less burdensome, by being taken from us by pennies and twopences at a time; since, by the frequent repetition of these small, and seemingly contemptible sums, there will be an annual addition of expence from 5 *l.* to 20 *l.* a-year, to many citizens, who can reap no other benefit from the bridge, but taking a walk on it on Sunday. Many an industrious citizen has raised an ample fortune, from no greater original stock than what the imposition for this bridge will cost several private people during the years it is proposed to continue, much more during the years it will probably be continued to finish this work, or for some other project of full as little public utility.

utility. For, though it is now mentioned, that the imposition is to be continued only for a determined number of years, you are grossly mistaken, if you imagine it will end with those years, or with the finishing that particular work. Our task-masters know the nature of mankind better. People wince and struggle at the first imposition of a burden; but, when once they have bowed their neck to the yoke, they become habituated to the oppression, and at last bear it as tamely as if they had never been in a better condition. It was even mentioned, at the meeting of the county, that if they could once get this tax laid on, it would be easy to get it continued. But what was there mentioned as an inducement for laying it on, I hope you will look on as a sufficient reason for rejecting it.

WE all know what useful and ornamental additions have been made to the city of Edinburgh within these few years; but which of us was taxed for them? The Royal Infirmary was a work of much greater expence than the proposed bridge, as well as more benevolent and humane in its destination; yet it was raised and endowed by the generous industry of one public-spirited citizen, who, without any new imposition on the people, procured voluntary contributions to it from the remotest parts of the British dominions. Those very Americans, who are now in arms, tearing the British empire to pieces, and exposing themselves to all the horrors of an intestine war, rather than submit to a trifling tax; these very people, or their fathers, taxed themselves voluntarily, by contributing liberally towards the Infirmary. A scheme really beneficial, and conducted by a sincere love of mankind, meets with voluntary assistance from every hand. Another, formed from a false pretence to the public good, but in reality suggested for private conveniency, must be supported by oppressive taxes. At this rate, Pharaoh was public-spirited, when he raised the public works that supported the luxury and dignity of the imperious taskmasters, while the children of Israel groaned under the yoke. But if such a bridge must necessarily be built, let a subscription be opened. The Duke of Buccleugh, the President, the Member of Parliament for the county, the Sheriff-deputy, and all the partisans of the bridge, will probably subscribe liberally.

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Men of opulent fortunes, and in public offices, will be glad of such an opportunity of shewing their public spirit, and of keeping off the burden from the poor of a county, to whose support they owe the offices they now enjoy, and the still higher offices to which they expect in time to succeed. These are people of great weight in this county, and their example and influence cannot fail to incline many others to shew their liberality in support of this plan. But supposing, which is not to be supposed, that the generous example of these public-spirited patrons should have no influence over the more retentive hearts and purses of other rich men, as a better avenue from the south to the High Street of Edinburgh would certainly be convenient, I will venture to lay before the public a scheme that would answer all the beneficial purposes of the bridge. And, if the great and opulent will not lend a helping hand, yet the sum requisite may be easily raised, without any tax or burden on the poor, as the whole expence is not above what may be obtained from the voluntary contributions of men of very moderate fortunes, and confined liberality.

The Canongate is only a suburb to Edinburgh; but, by the late encrease of the nature and number of its buildings, and the wealth of its inhabitants, may be justly looked on as one half of the length of the town, which I reckon extends from the Castlehill to the Abbey; so that the middle of the whole will be about the Netherbow; and a good avenue from the south made thereabout, would equally suit both ends of the town. The buildings, on the west side of St Mary's wynd, are, generally, very mean ones; and, at the lower end of it, are only stables, and coach-houses, and hay-lofts. The passage there is not steep, but much too narrow. Let the Town-council of Edinburgh order these buildings to be viewed and valued by proper tradesmen. The value being known, and the expence of removing them and paving the streets being easily ascertained, open a subscription. As soon as the sum requisite is subscribed, treat with the proprietors of the houses, who will probably be willing to dispose of them at an equitable price; and so the expence of an act of Parliament will be saved. But if any person should prove refractory, the consent of Parliament can never be refused to a bill supported
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by the city and county of Edinburgh, and opposed by only one or two refractory persons. The pulling down of these houses would not only open a sufficient avenue to the High Street and Canongate, but might, perhaps, leave depth enough for a row of shops; for which the Town might draw a good rent, as they could not fail to be well accustomed, from the conveniency of the situation. If there is not room enough, the shops must be let alone. The advantages of this method are these :

1. THE expence may be known to a farthing, beforehand.
2. IT would not make the people complain of being oppressed with taxes.
3. IT will be managed with more œconomy than the other can possibly be, as no part of the money will be consumed in the collection.
4. IT would not serve as a precedent for the gentlemen of the county to impose a tax on the town.
5. IT will be solely under the direction of the Magistrates, who are the natural guardians of the city and its privileges.
6. IT will not make us languish in suspense for the event, as the ruins may be removed, and the street paved, in a few months.
7. THE foundations of the arches will not sink.
8. THE side-walls will not give way.
9. WE will not be put to the expence of mourning for our friends and relations buried in its ruins.

WHATEVER may be the general opinion of this scheme, let the citizens remember, that it is of the highest importance to them, to keep the management of their own affairs in their own hands, and not to give
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up their privileges to every idle projector. Let the inhabitants of the county consider, how dangerous a precedent it is, to let themselves be taxed for the city. And, let both be persuaded, that the Bridge-tax, how heavy and oppressive soever, is but a slight essay how far they will bear, and will be but a small foretaste of greater burdens to come; and that, if they suffer themselves to be led into submission to the proposed oppression, merely to gratify the caprice of a few leading men, *the bit will never depart from their jaws, nor the hook from their nostrils.*

F I N I S.